

Big Book – 12-Step A.A Manuscripts – Refresher

Serving the Primary Purpose

Dick B.

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Part One

The Beginnings

Alcoholics Anonymous, the basic text of A.A., which many have called the “Big Book,” went through several stages before its First Edition was finally published in April of 1939.¹

How the Process Started

The First Forty: Prior to the Big Book’s publication, and in the fall of 1937, Bill Wilson and Bob had counted noses among some forty A.A. pioneers; and they found that half had recovered and that another quarter had recovered after relapse.² They were surprised, pleased, and thankful.³ And A.A.’s own literature records that outreach thinking (in the form of publishing a book) began when Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith concluded that their 40 cases of recovered alcoholics in Ohio and New York had proved the effectiveness of the simple Akron program.⁴ And fairly soon, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., dispatched A.A. trustee-to-be Frank Amos to investigate the “self-styled Alcoholic Group of Akron, Ohio” and report what had been going on.⁵

The Miraculous Results Frank Amos Saw: Amos reported to Rockefeller that the alcoholic group consisted of people—“all considered practically incurable by physicians—who have been reformed and so far have remained teetotalers.” Their stories, he said, “many of them almost miraculous, . . . were all remarkably alike in the technique used and the system followed.” Amos declared that those investigated “had been cured by Smith and his friends’ activities and the Christian technique prescribed.” His report specifically stated the five required, and two recommended, elements of the “Program.”⁶ And I have listed the seven items in many of my titles and also accompanied them with detailed descriptions of how the Akron program actually

¹ For a review and comparison, see Dick B., *Real Twelve Step Fellowship History: The Old School A.A. You May Not Know* (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 2006).

² *RHS: Co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous our beloved DR. BOB* (NY: A.A. Grapevine, Inc., 1952), 8; *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), 76; *The Language of the Heart: Bill W.’s A.A. Grapevine Writings* (NY: The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., 1988), 10.

³ Documentation and extensive citations in Dick B., *Cured!: Proven Help for Alcoholics and Addicts*, 2d ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 2006), 1-3.

⁴ *Pass In On* (NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1984), 177-80; *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers* (NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), 123-24

⁵ *DR. BOB*, 128-29.

⁶ *DR. BOB*, 129-31.

worked and implemented the items specified by Amos.⁷ Dr. Bob called the group a “Christian Fellowship.”⁸

And Then the Book Idea: Bill Wilson presented the idea of writing the book to Dr. Bob and then to 18 Akron alcoholics who gathered at T. Henry Williams’ home.⁹ Bill’s earliest biographer wrote a lengthy report of the meeting, the arguments, and the vote.¹⁰ In the end, with Dr. Bob’s support, and after quite a dispute, Bill answered objections and achieved a pass vote by a slim two-vote majority which Bill described as “a mighty close shave.”¹¹

Framing a Text

The Personal Stories: In March or April of 1938, Bill Wilson began penning his manuscript ideas on yellow scratch sheets of notes outlining each chapter.¹² He dictated sections to Ruth Hock, who typed the manuscript.¹³ An outline of the book had been prepared by Bill’s partner Henry Parkhurst, and it proposed that the book consist almost exclusively of “stories.”¹⁴ A draft cover for the proposed book featured the name *Alcoholics Anonymous* and specifically declared that the book contained the “pathway to a cure.”¹⁵ The plan and purpose of this pathway to a cure—as related by the story-tellers—was summarized by Bill Wilson on page 13 of his draft mimeographed manuscript. There Bill said, as to the personal stories:

“Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he found or rediscovered God. These give a fair cross section of our membership and a clear-cut idea of what has actually happened in their lives.”¹⁶ Bill later modified part of this language, stating: “Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God.”¹⁷

The Chapter Beginnings: At first, only two chapters of the basic text were written out.¹⁸ Bill sent them to Dr. Bob with the following remarks:

As a starting point I have, with the help of the folks here, dictated and mimeographed two chapters of the proposed book, one in the nature of an introduction, and the second my

⁷ For example, see *Real Twelve Step Fellowship History*, 4-13.

⁸ *DR. BOB*, 118.

⁹ *RHS*, 8.

¹⁰ Robert Thomsen, *Bill W.* (NY: Harper & Row, 1975), 266-71; Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1998), 224-27.

¹¹ *Pass It On*, 180

¹² *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 153.

¹³ *Pass It On*, 193.

¹⁴ With the permission of Paul L., archivist at Stepping Stones, I found, copied, studied, and then forwarded to the Griffith Library at Bill’s birthplace in East Dorset, Vermont, the actual written Big Book Outline by Parkhurst.

¹⁵ For a picture of this draft cover, see the last page of our Dr. Bob pages: <http://www.dickb.com/our-pages-on-drbob.shtml>

¹⁶ Page 13 of a copy of the “Original” manuscript given and inscribed to me by Ray G., archivist at Dr. Bob’s Home.

¹⁷ See *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 3rd ed. (NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976), 29.

¹⁸ *Pass It On*, 193; *The Language of the Heart*, 106.

own story. These I inclose [*sic*] to you together with a rough outline of the other chapters.¹⁹

They were placed in reverse order from that used when the Big book was finally published.²⁰ “There is a Solution” was the first chapter, and “Bill’s Story” was the second chapter. The language was different from that found in the actual First Edition.²¹

The Process of Assembling the Contents into Manuscript Form

The Akron Submissions: Proposed chapters were sent to Dr. Bob as Bill wrote them.²² They were reviewed by a limited number of Akron AAs.²³ Generally they were returned to Bill without significant change.²⁴ And Bill continued writing succeeding chapters and sending them to Bob one by one. These too were returned from Akron without significant change; in fact with “warmest support.”²⁵ There were those in Akron who were opposed to the book and to how Bob and Bill were handling it.²⁶ For one thing, they had expected to have their Society called “The James Club.”²⁷ This because the Book of James was their favorite from the Bible.²⁸ Moreover, Dr. Bob said the basic recovery ideas were taken from the Bible, and particularly from James—along with the Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 13 in the Bible (which Bob and others usually called the “Good Book”).²⁹ The Bible and these segments were mentioned over and over in connection with the pioneer days.³⁰ However, the Bible emphasis in Akron seemed to yield to the Akronite focus and efforts in assembling the majority of the personal stories for the book.³¹

The Mimeograph Stage: Finally, the proposed book was put in mimeographed form, and a number of copies were circulated for review, suggestions, and approval.³² Bill submitted the first copy to his friend Rev. Samuel M. Shoemaker, who commented to Bill that he had been in touch with him from the very start and had received and read the first mimeographed copy of the first book.³³ A good many changes in that mimeograph piece were made and now can be found in

¹⁹ With permission of Paul L., archivist, I obtained a copy of this letter from the Stepping Stones Archives during my research there in October, 1991. See Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1998), 228

²⁰ *The Akron Genesis*, 227-28.

²¹ With permission of Paul L. at Stepping Stones, I also obtained copies of these first two, in their reverse order.

²² *DR. BOB*, 152.

²³ *DR. BOB*, 152-53.

²⁴ *The Akron Genesis*, 228-30.

²⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 159; *Pass It On*, 196.

²⁶ *DR. BOB*, 153, 213, 217; *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 145.

²⁷ *DR. BOB*, 213; *Pass It On*, 147.

²⁸ *Pass It On*, 147.

²⁹ *DR. BOB*, 96-97.

³⁰ Dick B., *Turning Point: A History of Early A.A.'s Spiritual Roots and Successes* (San Rafael, CA: Paradise Research Publications, 1997), 15-21.

³¹ *DR. BOB*, 153-54; *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 164.

³² *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 165.

³³ See Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*, 2d ed (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1999), 7-10; Charles Taylor Knippel, *Samuel M. Shoemaker's Theological Influence on William G. Wilson's Spiritual Program of Recovery* (St. Louis University, 1987), Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 69-70; Cecil Cox Offill, . . . *And Thy Neighbor: Sam Shoemaker's Talks about Creative Living* (Waco, TX: Work Books, 1967), 24.

large measure by examining what came to be called the Printer’s Manuscript – which has just been purchased for a large price and will soon be published by its owners Ken and Krista Roberts.³⁴ That Printer’s Manuscript shows on its face the many alterations made in the multilith copy on the basis of criticisms from people in the East Coast area.³⁵ And we invite students to visit the Printer’s Manuscript—whose owners call it the “Holy Grail”—when it is actually published and available.

In any event, the First Edition was finally completed, and was published in April of 1939.³⁶

Gloria Deo

[Part Two follows, and it will cover the “Contending Ideas and Approaches” as the proposed Big Book content was debated, altered, and finalized for publication as the First Edition]

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³⁴ See the website and announcement of Mr. and Mrs. Ken Roberts, owners, <http://www.aaholygrail.com/5.html>

³⁵ *The Language of the Heart*, 200-02.

³⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 173.